

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0204

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BONN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY

USCINCEUR PRIORITY

CINCNAVEUR PRIORITY

COMIDEASTFOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 8331

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT PFOR ET

SUBJECT: PMAC ANNOUNCED COUP PLOT FOILED, EXECUTIONS: EMBASSY
PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

REF: ADDIS ABABA 8301 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY - SITUATION FOLLOWING EXECUTIONS ANNOUNCED MORNING JULY 13
STILL TOO FLUID AND CONFUSED TO MAKE JUDGMENTS WITH ANY DEGREE
OF CONFIDENCE. VIEWS OFFERED IN THIS TELEGRAM ARE THEREFORE
PRELIMINARY. THIS EMBASSY INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT, ALTHOUGH
GOVT HAS CHARGED THOSE EXECUTED WITH A VARIETY OF COUNTER-
REVOLUTIONARY CRIMES, EPMG'S TRUE MOTIVES REMAIN UNCLEAR.
EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT EXECUTIONS MAY BE RESULT OF INTERNAL
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POWER STRUGGLE, POSSIBLY ALONG BOTH TRIBAL AND POLITICAL LINES,

AND MAY RESULT IN FURTHER ASCENDANCY OF MAJOR MENGISTU AND HIS PREDOMINANTLY GALLA FOLLOWERS. FURTHER EXECUTIONS MAY BE ANNOUNCED. END SUMMARY.

1. DEPT WILL HAVE SEEN FBIS COVERAGE OF PMAC'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT A COUP PLOT HAS BEEN FOILED AND THAT A NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS, PROMINENTLY INCLUDING BG GETACHEW NADEW, MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR OF ERITREA PROVINCE, AND DIRG POLITICAL SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MAJOR SISAY HABTE, HAVE BEEN EXECUTED.

2. SUBSTANCE OF PMAC STATEMENT INCLUDING LIST OF NAMES OF THOSE SHOT FOLLOWING DEATH SENTENCES ADMINISTERED BY A COURT MARTIAL AND OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION THUS FAR AVAILABLE TO US, BEING REPORTED IN SEPTELS.

3. PRELIMINARY COMMENTS WHICH FOLLOW ARE BASED ON INFORMATION THUS FAR AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY, WHICH IS INCOMPLETE. ADDIS IS FILLED WITH RUMORS, CONFLICTING VERSIONS OF THE EVENTS AND MOTIVATIONS WHICH UNDERLIE THE OFFICIAL PMAC ANNOUNCEMENT REFERRED TO ABOVE. SALIENT FEATURES OF PICTURE AT THIS STAGE SEEM TO INCLUDE FOLLOWING:

A. SETTING ASIDE PAST CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN ATNAFU AND MENGISTU AS FALLING IN A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT CATEGORY, THE DEATH OF SISAY HABTE BREACHES THE COHESION OF THE DIRG'S CORE GROUP FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION. WE CANNOT NOW PREDICT THE EFFECTS, BUT CURRENTLY INCLINE TO THE VIEW THAT IT MARKS THE FURTHER ASCENDANCY OF MENGISTU AND HIS FACTION, AND THE FURTHER DECLINE OF COLLEGIAL DECISION-MAKING IN THE PMAC.

B. OUR LOCAL EMPLOYEES HAVE HEARD OF RELATIVES THAT HAVE ALSO BEEN SHOT AND WHOSE NAMES HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLISHED. IT MAY WELL BE, THEREFORE, THAT THE RELEASED LIST OF THOSE EXECUTED IS INCOMPLETE. INDEED, PMAC'S ANNOUNCEMENT PROMISES FURTHER DECISIONS SHORTLY ON THE CASES OF ARRESTED ZEMETCHA CHAIRMAN AND DIRG MEMBER MAJOR KIRSO ALEMAYEHU AND OTHER ZEMETCHA STAFF MEMBERS.

C. ANNOUNCEMENT LUMPS INDIVIDUALS SHOT FOR "HIGH TREASON" WITH PERSONS EXECUTED FOR HOARDING FOOD, SUGGESTING THAT PMAC IS AT PAINS TO ADDUCE EVERY SORT OF VILLAINY TO JUSTIFY THIS ACTIONS. PERHAPS OMINOUSLY, THE TRAITORS ARE CHARGED INTERALIA WITH COLLUDING WITH FOREIGN AGENTS IN THEIR PLOT. MEANWHILE ETHIOPIAN MEDIA
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ARE CONTINUING THEIR STRONGLY PRO-EASTERN COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL EVENTS, AND HIGHLIGHT CAPTAIN MOGUS WOLDE-MICHAEL'S MEETING IN MOSCOW WITH KOSYGIN.

D. SIGNIFICANTLY, THOSE SHOT INCLUDE PROMINENT FIGURES -- GETACHEW NADEW AND SISAY HABTE -- LONG REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN WORKING FOR BALANCE AND MODERATION WITHIN THE DIRG. GETACHEW NADEW (NOT A DIRG MEMBER) WAS KNOWN TO USE AS AN ADVOCATE OF AN EARLY ERITREAN SETTLEMENT BY POLITICAL MEANS, WHILE SISAY HABTE WAS REPORTED TO

HAVE MADE EFFORTS TO KEEP ETHIOPIA'S FOREIGN POLICY BALANCED IN CONSONANCE WITH THE COUNTRY'S NATIONAL INTERESTS. SISAY, AS DEPT AWARE, HAD ALSO OF LATE BEEN CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH EFFORTS TO START NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE ADDIS GOVT AND THE ERITREAN INSURGENTS. WE SHALL LOOK FOR INDICATIONS ON MANNER IN WHICH EVENTS MAY NOW HAVE ALTERED THE POLICY THRUST OF THE DIRG.

E. OUR SOURCES ARE UNANIMOUS IN ASCRIBING THE INITIATIVE AND DIRECTION OF THESE EVENTS TO MENGISTU. INDEED, ATNAFU WAS OUT OF TOWN BRIEFLY LAST FIRDAY, RETURNING EARLY SATURDAY, TO INSPECT SOME NEW MILITIAS IN THE SOUTH. THE INCLINATION OF OBSERVERS HERE IS, THEREFORE, AT PRESENT TO SEE THESE EXECUTIONS AS A MOVE BY THE FIRST VICE CHAIRMAN TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION, BACKED WITHIN THE DIRG BY THE "HOLETA MILITARY TRAINING CENTER GROUP/ AND MANY NCO'S (WHO ARE MOSTLY GALLA).

F. GIVEN CENTRALITY TO DATE OF THE MILITARY ON THE ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL SCENE, QUESTION ARISES TO WHAT EXTENT MENGISTU CAN COUNT ON SUPPORT WITHIN THE UNITS IN THE ACTIONS HE HAS TAKEN. INITIAL INDICATORS SUGGEST THAT PICTURE IS MIXED: TROOPS IN NORTHERN COMMAND ARE REPORTEDLY WAR-WEARY AND IMPATIENT WITH DIRG'S INABILITY TO PUT AN END TO THE ERITREAN STRUGGLE. AIR FORCE AND NAVY CONTAIN HIGH COMPONENT OF NORTHERNERS AND HAVE LONG BEEN DISSATISFIED WITH DIRG'S POLICIES. THIRD DIVISION HAS TIME AND AGAIN SHOWN EVIDENCE OF HOSTILITY TO MENGISTU PERSONALLY AND TO DIRG'S POLICIES. FORTH DIV, TO EXTENT TO WHICH IT IS NOT ENGAGED IN GUARDING PMAC'S SEAT ON MENELIK HILL AND OTHER ADDIS INSTALLATIONS, HAS BEEN COMMITTED PIECEMEAL AGAINST WIDESPREAD INCURGENCY IN THE SOUTH (BALE, SIDAMO). AIRBORNE IS LARGELY GOJJAMI AND AMHARA AND RECENTLY DECLINED TO PUT THE ARM ON RESTIVE AIR FORCE OFFICERS DURING A CONFRONTATION WITH MENGISTU IN DEBRE ZEIT. NEWLY FORMED "FLAME DIVISION", ON OTHER HAND, SEEMS RELATIVELY WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS THE FIRST VICE CHAIRMAN. WE ALSO PRESUME THAT PARTICULARLY THE LARGE GALLA COMPONENT OF ENLISTED MEN IN VARIOUS UNITS SEE MENGISTU AS ONE OF THEIR OWN. OUR TENTATIVE CONCLUSION THEREFORE IS THAT MENGISTU

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IS COUNTING MORE ON THE INTERNAL INHIBITING EFFECTS OF CONFLICT WITHIN THE MAJOR UNITS THAN ON THEIR SUPPORT IN THE ACTIONS HE HAS NOW TAKEN. HAVING DONE AWAY WITH GETACHEW NADEW, WHO COULD BE SEEN BY MANY NORTHERN TROOPS AS HAVING DIED IN THE DEFENSE OF THEIR INTERESTS; WITH SISAY, WHO CERTAINLY HAD CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE WITH AIR FORCE CADRES EVEN THOUGH HE WAS CONTROVERSIAL WITH AIR FORCE AS WHOLE; IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER MENGISTU HAS CALCULATED THE COST/BENEFIT TRADE OFF CORRECLTY. RUMOR NOW HAS LCDR YEHUALESKET GIRMA, LEADING NAVY MAN ON THE DIRG, AS ALSO BEING EXECUTED. WE ARE ALREADY HEARING REPORTS THAT THE SECOND AND THIRD DIVISIONS ARE NOW PREPARED TO ACT AGAINST MENGISTU AND THE DIRG -- ALLEGATIONS WHICH WE HAVE OF COURSE HEARD MANY TIMES BEFORE.

G. WHILE MENGISTU'S REACTIONS TO THE "PLOT" ARE NATURALLY PRESENTED BY PMAC IN NATIONALISTIC AND IDEOLOGICAL TERMS, THE PERCEPTION OF MANY OF OUR ETHIOPIAN INTERLOCUTORS IS TRIBAL.

IN THEIR READING, MENGISTU AND HIS OROMOS (GALLAS) HAVE MOVED DECISIVELY AGAINST LEADING AMHARA AND TIGRE OPPONENTS TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR ASCENDANCY. BY THIS LINE OF REASONING, THERE IS A CORRELATION BETWEEN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND TRIBAL AFFILIATION, THE DOMINANT AMHARA/TIGRE GROUP FAVORING THE STATUS QUO WHILE THE LONG-SUPPRESSED GALLAS FAVOR RADICAL REFORMATION OF THIS SOCIETY. WE MAY RETURN TO THIS THEME AFTER WE HAVE HAD MORE TIME TO EXAMINE THE BIOGRAPHICS OF THOSE CENTRALLY INVOLVED IN THIS AFFAIR.

4. MEANWHILE, ADDIS IS GENERALLY CALM. WE HAVE NOTED SOME ROADBLOCKS ON THE MAIN ROADS LEADING INTO AND OUT OF THIS CAPITAL; AN INCREASE IN GUN-JEEP PATROLS AT NIGHT; SOME THUS FAR UNEXPLAINED POLICE AND MILITARY DEPLOYMENTS AROUND THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR; THE CURIOUS ABSENCE THEREFROM OF PSO COLONEL TESFAYE AND SOME OF HIS IMMEDIATE AIDES. ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF MG GIZAW BELAYNEH, HOWEVER, WAS ALIVE, WELL, AND FUNCTIONING IN HIS OFFICE AFTERNOON OF JULY 12. EMBASSY RESOURCES HAVE BEEN MOBILIZED TO FOLLOW EVENTS AS BEST WE CAN AND WE SHALL REPORT FURTHER AS THE SITUATION WARRANTS.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: IF QUERIED BY MEDIA CONCERNING OUR REACTION HERE OR USG REACTION TO EVENTS, WE ARE NOT GOING TO COMMENT. WE WILL, OF COURSE, WANT TO KNOW SOONEST OF ANY COMMENTS DEPT MAY FEEL IT HAS TO MAKE IN WASHINGTON. WE WOULD HOPE, HOWEVER, THAT AT LEAST AS LONG AS SIGNIFICANCE OF EVENTS REMAINS UNCLEAR, DEPT CAN AVOID BEING PINNED DOWN ON USG REACTION PUBLICLY. CONFIDENTIAL

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